

TO: WARM... WARMER?

Relations between Ukraine and NATO have become much warmer over the past six months. Soon after the notorious 9.11 events, new keynotes appeared in Ukrainian political rhetoric. The "upper levels" began to talk about the expediency of extending the framework of the NATO-Ukraine Distinctive Partnership Charter and coming as close to each other as NATO would be prepared to. Then followed a pause: during the pre-election campaign there was a conflict between the interests of cooperation with the USA and NATO on the one hand and a desire to play the anti-American rhetoric card before voters on the other.

When the election race was over, the Ukrainian leadership's Euro-Atlantic statements got warmer again. They didn't just remember about their readiness to "come closer", they began to talk about the chances of Ukraine to join NATO. During his visit to Poland in April, Ukraine's President L.Kuchma said in reply to reporters' questions about Ukraine's intention to join NATO: "Just invite us, and we'll join." And Parliament Vice Speaker S.Havrysh believes that Ukraine's presence in NATO is decisive for this country's European future: "It's only through membership at NATO that Ukraine can become an EU member"...

Did the reason lie in an awareness of the necessity to look for adequate responses to the new challenges? In an earnest desire to strengthen ties with the Alliance in the interests of national security? Or in the fear of being an outsider when a new format of Russia-NATO relationships launches a new decision-making mechanism in the field of regional security? (In his recent interview with *The Day* [Ukrainian daily], National Security and Defense Council Secretary Yevhen Marchuk stressed that "we need to be afraid of Russia's de facto membership of NATO happening before ours".

Most probably, all the three reasons work here. But it's not important in principle, because so far things are getting no further than cautious declarations...

What is important in the present circumstances is that the positive change of the [Ukrainian] leadership's attitude to NATO coincides with a visible positive change in the ordinary Ukrainians' view of the Alliance. A recent opinion poll shows that in the eyes of our citizens the image of NATO, which fell very low after its operation in Kosovo, is improving considerably (on April 18-24 the Razumkov Center conducted an opinion poll on problems of Ukraine-NATO relations).

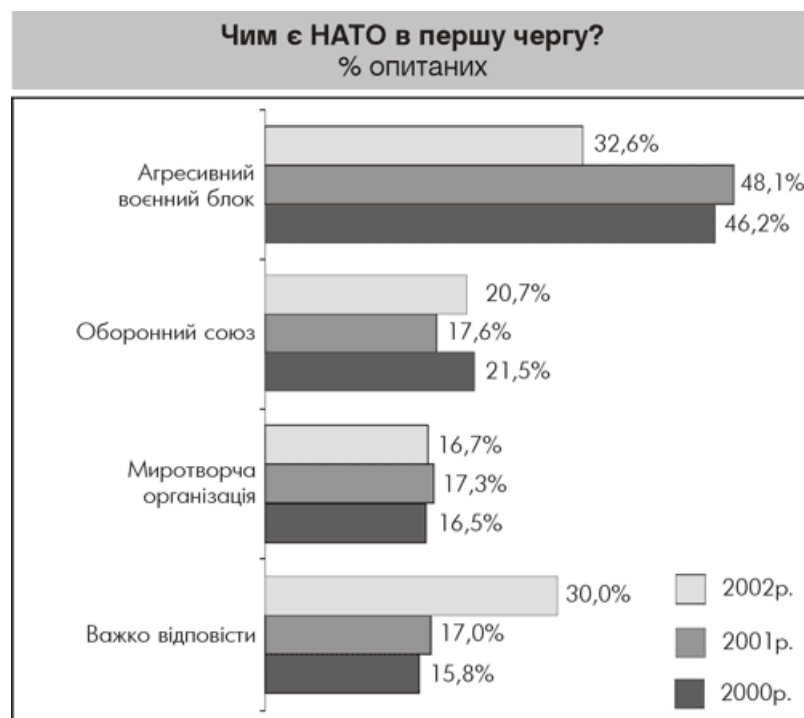
Thus, there are signs of a certain rapprochement of "official" and "grass-root" positions on relations with NATO. There is a deterring "extraneous" factor, though - Moscow's attitude to the Alliance's eastward expansion encouraged by Ukraine remains negative. But in the near future Russia's position may well become more realistic. Today's Moscow is very different from yesterday's, so why shouldn't tomorrow's Moscow move further away from yesterday's?

One way or another, the situation on the continent is changing rapidly. The architecture of European security is going to be substantially transformed. The November summit in Prague is supposed to beef up NATO's ranks. But before that NATO's leadership plans to considerably modernize relations with Russia - in late May Italy's Prime Minister S.Berlusconi will receive Presidents V.Putin and G.W.Bush and NATO Secretary General G.Robertson in Rome where a document on a new format of Russia-NATO relations is expected to be signed.

And what about Ukraine? Will it use its chance to more clearly formulate its position and go further than declarations at last?

NATO In The Eyes Of Ukrainians: A Peacemaker Or An Aggressor?

Here is one fact worth attention. In recent years, with no other international structure has Ukraine had such a high level of defense cooperation, advantageous both politically and economically, as with NATO (for example, about 600 joint Ukrainian-NATO actions and only 52 Ukrainian-Russian ones took place in 2001). Yet, almost every second Ukrainian (according to opinion polls of 2000-2001) had a negative attitude to the Alliance, believing it to be an aggressive bloc. (The returns of national polls conducted by the Razumkov Center in June, 2000, September, 2001 and April, 2002 are presented in the diagram "What Is NATO Primarily?").



There were several reasons for such an attitude. Firstly, the conservative-nostalgic sentiments of a large section of the population brought up with the Soviet anti-NATO propaganda. Secondly, the influence of the "Russian factor", because till September 2001 the conflict nature of NATO-Russian relationships had been actively carried by Russian media into Ukraine's information space (presently, though, anti-NATO rhetoric remains the prerogative of leftist patriots). Thirdly, most Ukrainians simply knew nothing (and still know very little) about the specific facts of cooperation with NATO, including those in the framework of the "Partnership for Peace" program. Fourthly, NATO's military operation in the Balkans (Ukraine's position was ignored then) made a rather negative influence on Ukrainians' attitude to NATO. There was also pressure from NATO in connection with they supply of Ukrainian weapons to Macedonia where, as in Kosovo, its position appeared to be more pro-Albanian than pro-Slavic.

But, as the diagram shows, Ukrainians' attitude to NATO changed essentially by April, 2002 - it became friendlier. In comparison with the year before, the number of respondents who believed NATO to be an aggressive military bloc reduced sharply (from 48.1% to 32.6% - i.e. by 15.5%). The number of those who regarded NATO as a defense alliance grew a little, with the number of those who believed it to be a peacekeeping organization remaining the same. But the number of respondents who found it difficult to characterize the Alliance definitely grew visibly - by up to a third! Presumably, this "deliberating" part of Ukrainians may potentially increase the number of NATO's supporters.

Evidently, the general picture of Ukrainians' attitude to NATO has changed radically: unlike in the previous two or three years, more people judge it more positively than negatively (37.4% vs. 32.6%).

Apparently, there were several reasons. Firstly, a positive psychological response to the successful operation in Afghanistan led by NATO's shock force - the USA. On the whole, the allied countries proved their ability to use their high combat potential, to act flexibly in the international arena and to cooperate in the format of a broad coalition. It is also important that Ukraine terrorism made Russia's relations with the USA and NATO visibly better. The

and especially Russia took an active part in the anti-terrorism coalition. The common fight against terrorism made Russia's relations with the USA and NATO visibly better. The recent antagonists are now heading successfully toward a new format of cooperation.

The internal factor is important, too - more and more people in Ukraine support the idea of Ukraine's integration with the European Union whose backbone is made up of NATO member-countries. Besides, Ukrainians' attitude to the Alliance was definitely influenced by the obvious lead in the recent election race of Viktor Yushchenko's bloc: his image in their eyes is strongly associated with the West (subsequently, NATO, its inalienable part).

It can also be expected that Ukraine's rapprochement with NATO will be supported by the new Ukrainian parliament. According to the returns of a February, 2002 poll among leaders of political parties and blocs, the majority of those who were elected to Parliament (except the Communist Party) agreed with the expediency of Ukraine's membership in NATO ([Yushchenko's] "Our Ukraine") or admitted this possibility ("For a United Ukraine", the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc, the Socialist Party) - "on condition that NATO becomes an element of the new security system".

So we can expect the new deputy corps to take a more pragmatic and sober position on the development of a Euro-Atlantic partnership. And Foreign Minister A.Zlenko won't have to convince the lawmakers of the necessity to cooperate with NATO, as his predecessor B.Tarasjuk had to just three years ago. In other words, the similarity of the President's and Parliament's positions and efforts in foreign policy is a significant fact.

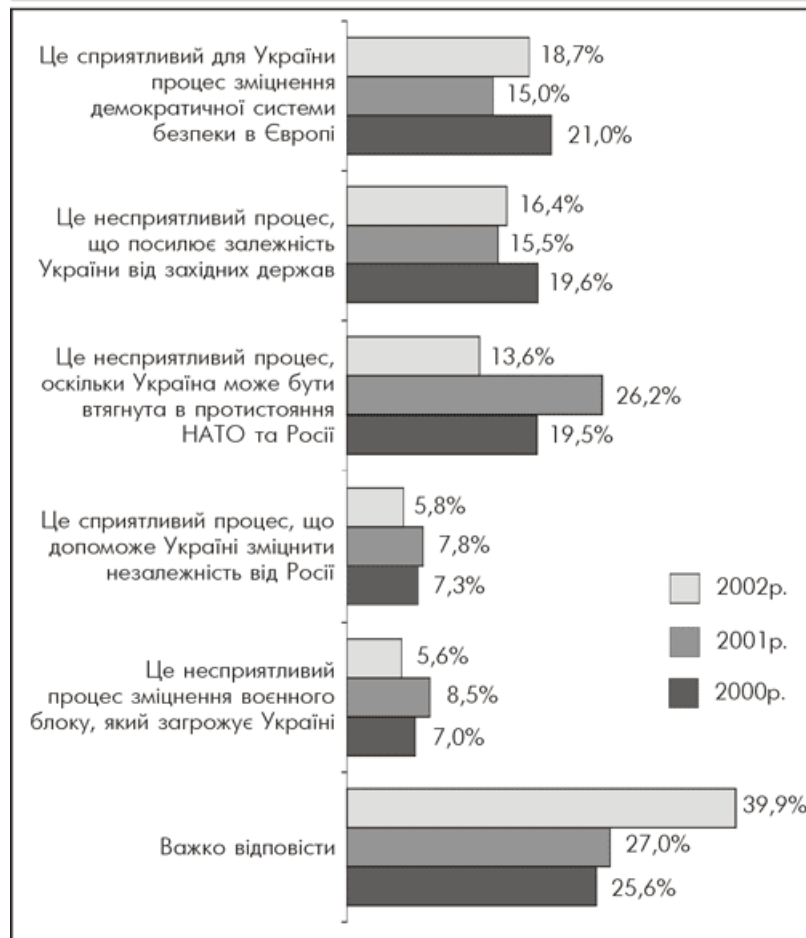
NATO's Eastward Expansion: Ukraine's Problem Or Chance

The candidate countries for NATO membership held a summit in Bucharest in March. The Prague summit in November will give the green light to our neighbors - Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia and the three Baltic countries who stand the best chances for NATO membership. What will NATO's imminent enlargement from the Baltic to the Black Sea mean to Ukraine? - At least that today's "rigid" criteria for membership in NATO shouldn't be overestimated any longer - NATO is making definite headway from a military-political defensive alliance toward a more flexible political-military security structure. And in the light of the United States' recently changed position, Ukraine has many more chances to join the "upgraded" Alliance in the future - during the May 2 hearings in the US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs M.Grossman stated: "The events of September 11 show us that the more allies we have, the better our prospects".

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...months remaining before the epoch-making Prague summit, it's very important that the average Ukrainian's "warmer" look upon NATO is reflected in his ...
...expansion. That is, Ukraine has a choice: either it just keeps on declaring its positive stance on NATO's enlargement, or it gets directly involved in this pro ...
...applying for membership. It would in no way conflict with our plans to join the European Union (where 12 out of its 15 members are members of NATO). There is the ...
...positive experience of Bulgaria and Romania which, although being not too far ahead of us in terms of economy and democracy, already have EU candidate-member status.

Let's have a look at the diagram "Attitudes of Ukrainian citizens to the process of NATO's enlargement" which also comprises the returns of the three above-mentioned polls. The comparison of the figures testifies to at least three notable trends.

Ставлення українських громадян до процесу розширення НАТО, % опитаних



Number one: there is a sharp (twofold!) decrease - from 26.2% down to 13.6% - in the number of those who fear that when the Alliance expands, Ukraine may be involved in a confrontation between Russia and NATO. In other words, there are now much fewer Ukrainians who frightened to find themselves sandwiched between the Western "hammer" and the Eastern "anvil".

Number two: there is a certain increase (4%) in the number of respondents who are convinced that NATO's enlargement as a means of strengthening the democratic security system in Europe is favorable for Ukraine.

Number three: there is a greater diversity of opinions about NATO's eastward pace in today's Ukraine than in "yesterday's" - in 2000 and 2001 when public opinion was dominated by stereotypes like "aggressor", "expansion" [the word has a generally negative meaning in Russian and Ukrainian] etc. "Yesterday" every second Ukrainian citizen (50.2%) opposed to NATO's enlargement, and "today's" number is 35.6% - slightly more than a third.

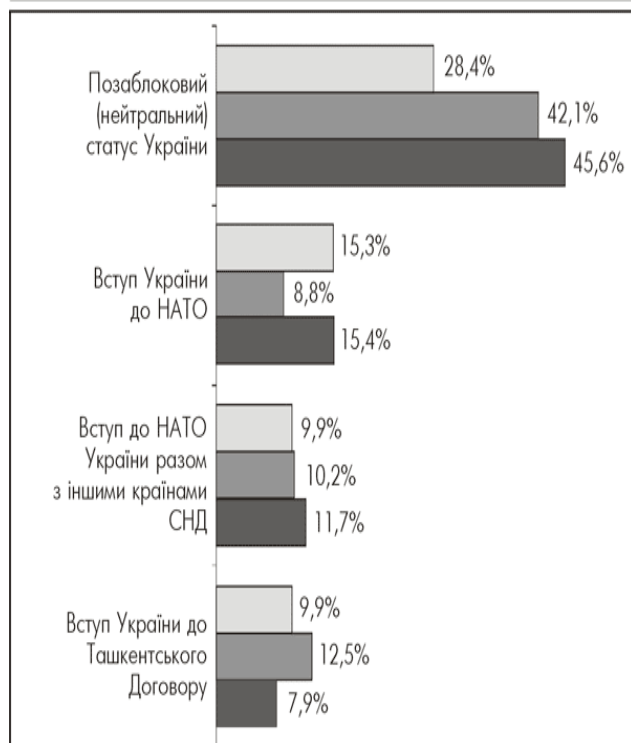
So if we succeed in strengthening democracy (just by checking corruption, reducing the influence of administrative resources, giving more freedom of expression and strengthening the civil society), we could cooperate with NATO not only in defense: we could also come closer politically. So far, political cooperation in the frameworks of the Partnership Charter is merely declarative.

Prospects: Options Possible

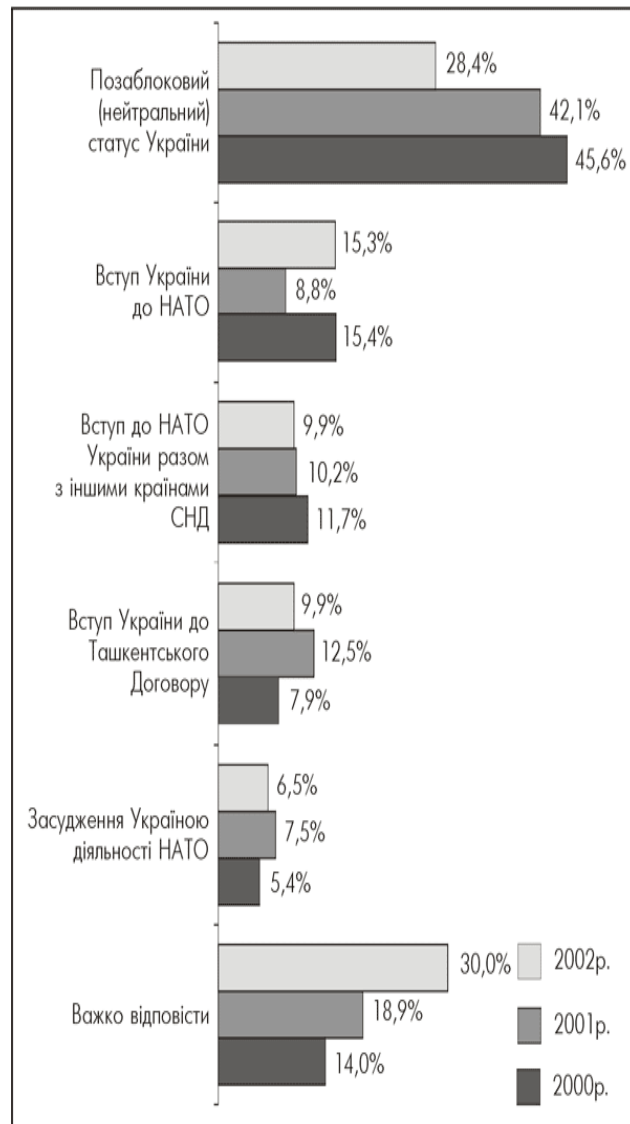
There may be different assessments of the Alliance and its eastward movement, the degree of expediency of Ukraine's cooperation with it, but it's impossible to ignore this powerful and influential military-political structure. What should a Ukraine-NATO relationships be like? The experience of our neighbors, including Russia, shows that there is no rational alternative now to strengthening our cooperation with the Alliance. The development of Ukraine's cooperation with it enhances Ukraine's role in the European security system, facilitates military reform and democratic change in this country. Finally, it helps to strengthen the nation's security.

Ukrainians' view of this problem has also changed lately. The picture reflecting the dynamics of their assessments is presented in the diagram "Which form of cooperation with NATO meets Ukraine's national interests?". The most notable comparison is the drastic reduction (from 45.6% to 28.4%) in the number of those who support Ukraine's non-aligned status. There are grounds to presume that Ukraine's non-alignment in its present form is widely regarded as uncertainty and vagueness of its foreign political course, as keeping aloof from global and European processes. (The prospects for joining the EU are very distant, the attitude to the Russia-Belarus Union is rather skeptical. Joining the Tashkent Treaty is hardly expedient, and formal membership in NATO is not on the agenda so far.)

Яка форма взаємовідносин з НАТО відповідає національним інтересам України? % опитаних



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As the diagram shows, the respondents are not enthusiastic about the idea of joining the Tashkent Treaty (only every tenth supports it), while their attitude to joining NATO together with the other CIS countries is notably wary. But the growing number of supporters of Ukraine's membership in NATO (compared with last year) is quite significant (15.3%). Besides, Ukrainians are far from positive that condemning NATO's activity meets Ukraine's national interests. The "tail" of the diagram looks especially exemplary. In the past three years, there has been a drastic increase - 14% - 18.9% - 30% in the number of those who have difficulty defining a format of Ukraine-NATO relations. It means that the former black-and-white picture of relations has more semi-tones and tints now, and it's really difficult to assess.

The above needs to be summed up in brief. On the one hand, Ukrainians are increasingly disappointed about the present position of this country's non-alignment. On the other hand, the number of supporters of non-alignment has practically equaled the number of those who are positive about Ukraine joining NATO, either alone or together with other CIS nations. The previous picture was much more conservative - almost every second Ukrainian supported the "it's-not-my-business" geopolitical doctrine, while the number of hesitant respondents was far smaller.

Generally, there are two likely variants of further cooperation with NATO. The first, most far-reaching one is Ukraine's application for NATO membership. The positive aspect of this variant would be both Ukraine's increased security thanks to powerful allies and better chances to join the European Union. There's a price to be paid for it, though: the application wouldn't only be an "act of civil courage" by our leadership, it would mean joining the so-called NATO Membership Preparation Plan which requires preparedness in four areas:

policy and economy - peaceful settlement of all international, interethnic or territorial disputes; ensuring of justice and human rights; democratic control over armed forces; stability and well-being maintained through ensuring economic freedoms, social justice and environmental protection;

defense - ability to contribute to collective defense and new tasks of the Alliance;

resources - ability to appropriate sufficient funds for fulfilling obligations before the Alliance;

information security - introduction and maintenance of procedures necessary for protection of sensitive information; legislative support - bringing agreements with NATO to conformity with the domestic legislation.

The obvious conclusion is that Ukraine is still a long way to real membership of NATO. But on the other hand, are we so much worse than Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia who have already applied for membership? We might as well contribute to the collective defense and new tasks. If all the other criteria were ignored...

The second possible variant (we rule out the Belarussian variant of non-cooperation as very unlikely) is further strengthening of cooperation with NATO without going flat out on the membership issue. This is what is apparently happening now - Ukraine bears the affordable minimum of expenses and assumes symbolic obligations before NATO. The latter, correspondingly, provides available opportunities for cooperation, has practically no obligations to Ukraine and in serious situations deals with us "symbolically" - the way it happened in Kosovo. Well, not so bad... But only as long as nothing "serious" happens to Ukraine.

Therefore, both variants depend not only on NATO's readiness for rapprochement with Ukraine, but, primarily, on Ukraine's readiness.

As A Conclusion

Returns of opinion polls should be neither under- nor overestimated. And there's no guarantee that the leadership's position will be consistent (although, according to reliable sources, not long before the [March, 2002] elections the President okayed work on preparing an application to NATO).

So far it's premature to regard the coinciding declarations made by politicians and public opinion as a steady national consensus. Despite the visibly mollified attitude of Ukrainians